

CHAPTER 2 – DESCRIPTION OF PROPOSED ACTION, INCLUDING ALTERNATIVES

This section describes the proposed action and the alternatives evaluated in this EIS. Relevant background pertinent to the planning process is included.

Introduction

In December 2005, Parks, at the direction of the City Council, completed a *Park Planning Feasibility Study* in an effort to comprehensively address several upcoming opportunities to reinvigorate the Seattle Central Waterfront (MAKERS 2005). The Feasibility Study evaluated potential options for Piers 62/63, Waterfront Park, marine nearshore habitat enhancement, and several areas east of Alaskan Way, including a tunnel lid concept associated with replacement of the Alaskan Way Viaduct.

Because of substantial uncertainties about the timeline and solution to replace the Alaskan Way Viaduct and seawall, Parks decided to address in this EIS only the options related to Piers 62/63, Waterfront Park, and the nearshore habitat enhancement. Portions of the Feasibility Study planning area that are east of Alaskan Way are not considered in this EIS.

Specifically, the project area addressed in this EIS includes the waterfront area from the north side of Piers 62/63 to the south side of Waterfront Park, and from the Alaskan Way seawall westward to the Outer Harbor Line. Figure 2-1 shows the project area on an aerial photograph.



Figure 2-1. Aerial Photograph of the Project Area

Proposed Action and Purpose of the EIS

The proposed action is a decision by the City Council to adopt a Master Parks Plan for Parks properties in the Central Waterfront area.

This EIS has been prepared under the direction of Parks. The EIS serves as an informative environmental analysis of several alternative plans for Parks properties along the Seattle Central

Waterfront to ensure that the probable significant adverse impacts and mitigation appropriate for the current level of planning are identified and described. A reasonable range of alternatives that meet the project goals and objectives has been considered.

Because the proposed action is an early planning decision, many details about the designs of the alternatives are not known. SEPA refers to an EIS on a planning level decision (such as the proposed action) as a nonproject EIS (WAC 197-11-704). In other words, the action being undertaken by the City is not at the present time a specific construction project. When a decision is made to implement the plan, a project-level environmental review will be conducted to address features of the project that are presently unknown. The subsequent SEPA environmental review can build upon this nonproject EIS and focus on issues and adverse effects that were not covered in this EIS. At the time of implementing a specific project design, more detailed evaluations and mitigation can be considered. In addition, a number of permits and approvals will be required by city, state, and federal permitting agencies. Federal agencies will be required to comply with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) at the project-level review stage.

The EIS process, of which preparation of this EIS is a part, will enable interested citizens and agencies to review the proposal and comment on the proposed alternatives, their environmental effects, and mitigation that will be used to avoid, minimize, and compensate for adverse impacts, if needed. As required by SEPA (WAC 197-11-400) and the City's SEPA Ordinance, this EIS, including public comments, will be one of several information sources the City will use to evaluate the alternatives and that will help the City select a Master Parks Plan for the subject properties.

Project Area

The project area is located along approximately 1,350 feet of Elliott Bay shoreline west of Alaskan Way in the center of Seattle's Central Waterfront from north of Pier 57 to the Port of Seattle's Bell Street Marina (see Figure 2-1). Street ends of Pine Street, Pike Street, and Union Street, if extended to the shoreline, would terminate within the project area. The Virginia Street right of way between Piers 62/63 and the Bell



Alaskan Way Street Scene



Bell Harbor Marina Entrance

Concepts for pier shapes and locations

The locations and shapes shown in Figures 2-3 through 2-9 and described in this Final EIS are for planning purposes and could change during design and project-specific environmental review. All of the alternatives could be designed as offshore structures connected to Alaskan Way by one or more access ramps. The ramps could be designed to minimize the overwater coverage in the nearshore area, thereby providing aquatic habitat benefits.

Street Marina represents the north boundary of the project area.

The project area lies just south of the Port of Seattle’s Bell Harbor Marina, which boards approximately 500,000 cruise ship passengers each year, and just north of the waterfront’s tourist commercial strip, which includes Piers 54 to 57. Although the north apron of Pier 57 is City-owned and abuts Waterfront Park, the north apron is not included in the project area. Needed improvements identified in a recent *Condition Evaluation Piers 57, 58, and 60* (Tinnea and Associates, LLC 2006) will be addressed in a separate SEPA review process.

The Seattle Aquarium (at Piers 59 and 60) is located within the project area between Waterfront Park (at Pier 58) and Piers 62/63. The Aquarium receives about 640,000 visitors each year. Waterfront Park is located just south of the Seattle Aquarium. Piers 62/63 are located at the north end of the project area.

Historically, the shoreline along the project area was extended westward toward Elliott Bay through development and filling. Prior to its modification, the site was a gravelly beach bounded by a steep bluff (Parks 2004).

State ownership of the beds and shores on navigable waters to the line of ordinary high water is established by the State Constitution. WDNR is responsible for the management, lease, and sale of aquatic lands, and has the power to establish terms and conditions of leases. State harbor areas between the Inner and Outer Harbor Lines are established by the Harbor Line Commission. Generally, no development is allowed beyond the Outer Harbor Line. The majority of the submerged portions of the project area are between the Inner and Outer Harbor Lines. WDNR leases must be consistent with the constitutional provision that these areas be set aside forever for landings, wharves, streets, and other conveniences of navigation and commerce.

Description of the Alternatives

Five alternatives were evaluated in the Final EIS. The alternatives include the No Action/No Build Alternative, a Rebuild/Preservation Alternative, and three additional action or build alternatives. The following sections describe the alternatives.

General Features of the Alternatives

Each of the build alternatives would maintain approximately the same or slightly smaller total over water area as the existing structures. The total existing pier area associated with Piers 62/63 and Waterfront Park are about 125,755 square feet, or about 2.9 acres.

Construction of the alternatives would likely occur in two phases. Phase 1 for each of the build alternatives would remove and replace the existing Piers 62/63. Waterfront Park would remain during Phase 1, although some near-term maintenance and improvements could be needed depending on the timing of Phase 2. Removal of Waterfront Park along with a habitat enhancement at that location would likely accompany a future expansion of the Seattle Aquarium in Phase 2.

For pier construction, the piles would likely be laid out in a grid at 20 to 25 feet on center. Pile size would range between 16 and 24-inch diameter and would most likely be a mix of about 75 percent concrete and 25 percent steel piles. Although a design for the piers has not been completed at this time, the number of new piles would be substantially less than the number of timber piles associated with the existing pier structures.

The Park Planning Feasibility Study suggests that a number of near-term investments would need to be made for Waterfront Park to be viable for the next 5 years (MAKERS 2005). A recent Condition Evaluation (Tinnea and Associates, LLC 2006) reports that the timber piles supporting Waterfront Park are satisfactory in the near term, but that 10 to 35 piles need to be replaced by 2009. Corrosion has damaged substantial numbers of concrete-filled steel pipe piles and H-piles. The Condition Report recommends strengthening essentially all of these piles in the 2009 to 2010 timeframe. Also, the report recommends immediate concrete crack repairs and cathodic protection in various support beams. The recommended structural repairs for Waterfront Park are summarized in Figure 2-2.